

*Outcome Mapping:
building learning and
reflection into development
practice in Honduras*

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When project staff engaged in development work hear the words "monitoring and evaluation" (M&E) the reaction is commonly unease and apprehension about the potential consequences. While M&E often is primarily concerned with the overall effectiveness or worth of a project, some forms of M&E make learning their primary focus. A learning approach to M&E gathers data and information about the project's strengths and weaknesses and uses these to inform an ongoing cycle of reflection and improvement.

IDRC has introduced one such learning methodology through its "Building Learning Systems for Honduran Development" project. Known as outcome mapping (OM), it is a participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology that promotes strategic planning and continuous reflection and learning.

OM focuses on one particular category of results - changes in the behaviour of people, groups, and organizations with whom a project works directly. Changes in behaviour are known as "outcomes." Since development is essentially about people relating to each other and their environments, OM concentrates on people. OM shifts away from assessing the development impact of a program - defined as changes in state (for example, poverty alleviation or improved sanitation). Instead, OM argues that for each change in state there are correlating changes in behaviour. For example, achieving a lower incidence of gastrointestinal disease requires behavioural changes such as boiling water before consumption.

The OM methodology has been introduced to 14 institutions among non-governmental organisations, academia, and government through a progressive strategy of initial workshops followed by tailored institutional training sessions. More than 360 people have been trained in OM and key partners have been provided financial and technical support to apply the methodology.

The application of OM has effected change at institutional, individual and community levels. At the institutional level, practitioners note how the methodology has contributed to fulfilling institutional development needs, such as by providing a means to measure results in behavioural changes, learning about good practices, and offering effective tools to better determine and respond to beneficiaries' needs. Edwin Moya, coordinator of the National Center for Work Education (CENET) says "CENET needed something more to measure results. We did not have a tool that would respond to the questions we asked related to behavioural change."

At the individual level, the application of OM has improved professional skills by raising awareness of the importance of M&E for learning, and by making practitioners more conscious of the behavioural changes projects bring about.

OM has also been used in 14 municipalities in Garifuna, Miskito and other north coast communities as a community development planning tool to determine how to use poverty reduction strategy funds. In addition, CIDA's administrative unit in Honduras is using OM to plan future programming.



Another IDRC-funded project is employing a multi-stakeholder approach to management of the San Juan River on the north coast of Honduras. Its use of OM has helped create a reliable planning process that should assist the design of a sustainable community-based research and intervention agenda for the watershed.

Although OM in Honduras holds much potential, challenges have been encountered. Typically, the M&E component of a project is not considered an opportunity for learning in Honduras and is often done only for accountability purposes. In such contexts, OM is perceived as a complex, labour-intensive methodology because it demands time and resources for reflection, analysis, and learning.

Honduran institutions interested in applying OM also confront donor agencies' requirement that the logical framework approach (LFA) be used for planning, monitoring and reporting. (LFA is objective-based and results oriented, emphasizing quantitative results over qualitative changes.) To address this challenge, four OM users in Honduras combined the qualitative and participatory elements of OM with the LFA framework, creating an OM-LFA hybrid. One partner, Cover Crops International Clearing House (CIDICCO), incorporated more descriptive, qualitative indicators in the LFA framework. This modification allowed the project coordinator to elaborate a more comprehensive project report based on beneficiaries' needs, an approach that captured the interest of CIDICCO's main donor. CIDICCO was able to convince other donors and integrate the monitoring of qualitative indicators in its projects.

After almost four years of promoting this methodology, outcome mapping users in Honduras are organizing themselves into a Community of Practice (CoP). This CoP comprises of 16 individuals from seven institutions and is coordinated by the National Association for the Promotion of Ecological Agriculture (ANAFAE). Its purpose is to provide space for the exchange of OM experiences and promote, adapt and develop the methodology in Honduras. The Honduran OM CoP maintains close contact with the Latin-American Center for Outcome Mapping (LACOM) for support and international exchange.

